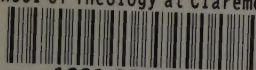


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STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN TRUTH.

Studies in Christian Truth

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By

The Rev. H. R. MACKINTOSH,

Edinburgh.

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Prefatory Note.

MOST of the following Studies appeared in THE STUDENT MOVEMENT during the winter 1912-13. They are now reprinted, with additions, in the hope that in this more permanent form they may prove helpful to those who are re-examining their faith, or who are uncertain what to believe. Not infrequently the best defence of Christianity is found to be a plain statement of its meaning.

H. R. M.

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I.

The Personality of God.

THE present chapter is in no sense an attempt to prove the Divine personality in a fashion which must convince the reader, for in the sphere of religion convincing proofs of that sort are quite impossible. Faith is always a venture, however reasonable a venture, and the man who has never really faced his own spiritual need, or who is set upon disbelieving, can always make out a pretty good case for doubt. My object rather is to show how belief in God as a Personal Being is vital to triumphant faith, and to offer a few sound reasons why those who have hitherto held the conviction that God is a Person should continue to hold it. If we can vindicate the centrality of this belief, then repel the chief objections, we shall have done all that can be suitably attempted here.

CHRISTIANITY AT STAKE.

When I speak of religion, it is scarcely necessary to say I mean Christianity. For nearly

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everyone in the student world to-day it is Christianity or nothing. Accordingly, the first point I want to make is that, without faith in God as personal Father, we lose touch with all the best things Christianity stands for—not the forgiveness of sins merely, or the assurance of immortality, but the noblest and most sublime thought of man and of society. If there is one truth absolutely demonstrated by history, it is the truth that you can't depersonalize God without in consistency depersonalizing man as well. Each conception varies with the other. Let men once be persuaded that the Power operating in the universe is blind, deaf, and unresponsive, and inevitably they will go on to regard themselves as no more than bits of nature, wheels in a great unconscious soulless machine that uses up its individual parts and at last flings them out on the scrap-heap. The track of radical Pantheism across the centuries is marked by a low or hopeless view of man. Accordingly the question—Is there a Heavenly Father? is a question covering the whole of life. Not simply our own happiness, but all our dreams for mankind and for the future hang upon it.

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Probably few will deny that the Divine personality is essential to the Christian view of things, yet in point of fact it has been denied. What at once occurs to us, however, is that a Christianity indifferent to the Personal Fatherhood of God could not be the Christianity of Jesus. The religion of which He forms the centre is not a speculative philosophy; it is not a system of morals either, or a nervous complaint, or a beautiful æsthetic dream. It stands for *a life of fellowship with God*, and its base lies deep in historic facts. It is only when we forget either of these two things—the dependence of Christianity on Jesus and its character as a life of communion with God—that we can feel the least temptation to minimise the importance of our subject or to accept the facile statement that religion would scarcely suffer though faith in God as a Person were to be given up to-morrow.

Let us take four facts, the significance of which for religion will not be questioned, and let us mark how the Divine personality comes into each.

JESUS' OWN FAITH.

Ecce Homo is a great book, one of the very

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greatest books ever written on the character and the teaching of Jesus Christ. But one defect is very striking—it has no chapter, scarcely even a substantial paragraph, on Jesus' view of God. The omission is as unscientific as it is unfortunate. Take any one of the Synoptic Gospels, and before you have read a dozen verses you are faced by Jesus' absorbing consciousness of the Father. It is upon His Father's business that He comes forward at the beginning, and only His Father's presence enables Him to hold out at the end. He lived in God by love and faith and hope; to do God's will constituted His very meat and drink. Prayer was the breathing of His soul. To reveal the Father to sinful men was, He felt, the supreme object of His mission; His one controlling aim was so to live and toil that He might be able finally to say: "I have finished the work Thou hast given Me to do." His hopes for mankind rested not on a general optimism, but on the Father's mercy. At last He died grasping the Father's hand. Survey this life-history as a whole; mark its spirit and trend and pervading atmosphere; and then inquire whether it retains any meaning at all if there is no personal God. Nothing is left, once

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you take away the Father, but a profound and pitiful delusion. Can we believe, we who have tried to know Jesus, that His so-called communion with God was only His mind speaking to itself, and that when He looked up from the Cross and said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit," His words were addressed to empty space? Can the influence of Jesus rest on such an abyss of self-deception? Yet self-deception it was if belief in God the Father has nothing in it.

It is a matter of common knowledge, too, that all great believers, in Bible times and later, have dwelt in such an intimacy with God that they would deem it a meaningless question whether God is or is not personal. One does not ask that about a friend. And God is their friend, and has taken them for His friends. It is when men are losing hold of God that they look round and begin collecting proofs of His personality. But in Scripture where faith moves about freely, like a child at home, we catch the clear voice of God's love—tender, simple, personal—and we also catch the answer to it, given by loyal hearts.

THE BAD CONSCIENCE.

Our faith in God as a Person is often spoiled

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by a mental tendency which, when it becomes an explicit theory, is usually described as Pantheism. This tendency or temptation—we all feel it—is to drift along with the general stream of things, like a chip of matchwood on the rapids, asking no questions about life or our proper responsibility for living. We simply take the line of least resistance. Now there is nothing to wake us up like a consciously wrong act. Something happens—something mean or foul—and at once, having done it, we start up realizing that *we are we*, and that over against us, in sheer antagonism to our evil, is God. His eyes are on our deed, His voice is audible in conscience. No man who has ever faced up to his own badness can confuse God and himself. He knows, without reasoning, that God and he are quite different, and that only by stifling his moral convictions could he say—

“I am the eye with which the Universe
Beholds itself, and knows itself divine.”

Forget conscience, and it is easy to construct fairly good arguments according to which Pantheism is perfectly simple and satisfactory. Everything, then, is God, and nothing except

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God exists anywhere—not the intellect or heart of man, not the difference between truth and falsehood, or between right and wrong. But give the conscience leave to speak out, and the personal distinction between God and man stands forth as clear as sunlight; for then we know that the moral law is the will of God, and that by breaking it we have lost touch with Him.

THE IMPRESSION MADE BY JESUS.

Question any man who has passed under the influence of Jesus, who has opened mind and nature to His power, and you find that he is always conscious of two impressions. The first impression is that of Jesus' holiness: he feels that this Man is far above him, with a goodness he can neither measure nor understand. The second impression is that of Jesus' love: it comes home to him that this Man is seeking him individually, with a grace that will never be content till he yields. Only, while we are thus engaged with Jesus, as if with Him alone, it breaks upon us, gradually or swiftly, that an infinite higher Presence is shining through His words and looks and acts. There is a greater Power embracing and suffusing all He does and

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is, and thrilling us by insistent nearness and appeal. What or Who is this Presence, this Power? Can we find the right name? It is certainly personal, for it comes to meet us in this perfect Holiness, Love, and Truth of Jesus, and these qualities have no intelligible meaning except as attributes of personal life. Also we are sure that to respond to this Presence, by sincerity and self-surrender, will give us the truest truth, the deepest rest, the strongest overcoming power and joy and freedom to help the world. Have we then any choice but to say—It is the Father, the living, personal God, Whose loved Son Jesus was? The God Whom Jesus reveals, Who comes to us through that life-story depicted by the Evangelists, is a personal God, for no otherwise can we describe the impression Jesus gives. The Spirit that looks out of Christ's eyes is One Whom we can know and love.

THE EXPERIENCE OF PRAYER.

It seems like arguing in a circle, but I fear the only testimony worth having at this point is that of people who *do* pray! And what I wish to suggest, and having suggested it, to dwell

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upon, is the truth that none of us can pray honestly, joyfully and prevailingly unless he is persuaded out and out that *prayer means real intercourse and communion*. Prayer is nothing at all except as on the one side there is a human "I," on the other a Divine "Thou," and living fellowship between the two. So far as I can see, this is a matter on which there can be no dispute. What could speech mean, if there were no one to listen and to reply? But more, the man who prays is conscious, be it dimly or clearly, that his prayer has been drawn from him by Another's influence. Some creative hand touched him, stirring the sense of need, claiming his trust; then he began to pray, sure amid all other uncertainties that it is best for children to speak out their requirements to the father, notwithstanding that the father may know already what their requirements are. *Real fellowship with the living God*—not make-believe about it, or keeping up a familiar but useless habit—this is prayer. When the veil lifts, as we are on our knees we know that God is taking us up in union with Himself, drawing us close to His great heart, noting and supplying the wants He sees and cares about. Such a God—the God we

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meet and touch in prayer—is a personal Being; otherwise in the word “person” no meaning would be left.

BUT CAN PERSONALITY BE INFINITE?

Objections have of course been made. Those which really matter can be reduced, I think, to one central and comprehensive objection, and this mainly we shall consider. It is said that God cannot be a person because a person is always finite. Many, accordingly, who acknowledge the reality of a God Whom in Matthew Arnold's words they would describe as “a stream of tendency, not ourselves, making for righteousness,” are unwilling to regard this “stream” as personal. That, they urge, is a conception inapplicable to God.

The answer is that while personality is finite *in our case*, this in no way proves that the same holds true of God. No one can deny that *we* awake to consciousness of ourselves through the stimulus and collision derived from the world of things around us. Apart from the objects and people in our environment, we should never have awakened up to think or feel, and indeed should have no mental life at all. Human beings, then,

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only become conscious of their own personality through contact with others, which means that human beings are finite. But this action and re-action between Self and the world does not *make* us persons so much as reveal to us the fact that we *are* persons. "Because we arrive at the knowledge of our own personality through contact with that of others, it does not follow that personality itself is constituted by the sharp shock which comes of knocking our own self against another self." In God, Who contains the grounds of His own being, there is accordingly no need for Him to come to self-consciousness by this avenue; He has no need of a world outside Him to sting Him (so to speak) into conscious life; He is conscious in Himself, with consciousness that has no limit. Finitude, in other words, is not essential to personality; rather it is a defect or imperfection present in the kind of personality we have. Sixty years ago, golf-balls were made of leather cases stuffed with feathers, and at that time it would have been quite natural to argue that no ball could possibly be driven more than 200 yards. Yet this would have been wrong; as everybody knows, balls were later made of much superior

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materials, and now, given a really good player, can be driven 250 yards with ease. The argument would have rested on a deficiency in a special sort of ball and inferred an incapacity in golf-balls as such. The illustration is a very simple one, but at least it reminds us that because we are finite persons, it is not proved that a personal God must be finite also. What *would* be a contradiction would be to say that God is evil; it is no contradiction to say that God is personal, and indeed the only perfect instance of personality.

A minor objection is that we cannot in the least imagine what God's mental life is like. When He hears our prayer, do feelings, thoughts, resolves arise in His mind as they would in the mind of a human individual? We can only say that we do not know. How the Divine mind operates we cannot tell. But no reasonable person declines to believe in the existence of inscrutable realities, merely on the ground that they are inscrutable. How little we understand of the connexion in ourselves of mind and brain, yet the connexion is indisputable.

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THE DIVINE PERSONALITY AND FAITH.

We may then sum up the meaning of God's Personality for religious faith is some such way as this. We must think Him as a Person, if He is not to be so utterly abstract for our mind as to be indistinguishable from nothing. Grant the difficulties of the idea; in spite of all, we get infinitely nearer truth by the assertion of it than by denial. Let any one who questions this ask himself how long it would have any meaning for our heart to affirm the *love* of God, if He had ceased to be a Person to our intelligence. The faith kindled by Jesus looks up, and sees a Heavenly Father; unless on analysis "Father" includes the thought of Personality, does it convey any sense whatever

It is true that the Bible never speaks of the Divine Personality, but it puts the same thought in a glorious phrase when it proclaims "the living God." And if the Bible writers know that God is living, or personal, it is in consequence of the great redeeming acts He has accomplished for the world. You recall Froude's anecdote. He was talking to Carlyle, and "I said to him," he writes, "that I could only believe in a God which did something.

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With a cry of pain, which I shall never forget, he said, 'He does nothing.' " There you have breaking out the instinctive feeling that only the living God—a God who acts and saves and rules—can be the object of such a faith as to master and satisfy our heart. But precisely this is the God we find in Jesus. In His life, His death, His victory and enduring power to redeem, the living God confronts us savingly, and we seize and know Him as our personal Father because in Jesus Christ we have seen the brightness of His face.

II.

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TO repeat one point I sought to make in the preceding chapter — the Bible has no phrases like “the Divine Personality”; it speaks rather of the “Living God.” Scripture writers, one can see, knew God to be alive because He had entered their own lives as Redeemer. He had stretched out His hand to work deliverance for impotent and captive souls. “The Lord is the true God,” Jeremiah cries, “He is the living God, and an everlasting King”; “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,” says the Psalmist at the close of a great prophetic song, “Blessed be the Lord God, Who only doeth wondrous things.” Always it was felt that the only God in Whom faith can rest confidently is a God Who “does something,” Who acts within the world, breaking with Divine power into human history in order to succour needy lives, and punish high-handed sinners, and open up the future yet once more for all who trust Him.

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This is the conception of God which ought to fill and master our thoughts as we now proceed to ask whether miracles happen. It is the one right and promising point of view for our inquiry. To talk of miracle, save on the assumption that there is a "Living God," is a mere waste of time. If we inhabit a dead world of mechanical necessity, a world unsustained by a great spiritual Life, resembling our life (though infinitely higher and more profound) in being self-conscious and self-controlled, miracle is absurd. You might as well ask the Forth Bridge to write a poem. Indeed, I should go the length of saying that no one is entitled to believe in miracle who does not know God as a Personal Reality. Assent to the supernatural is meaningless on any other terms.

As before, too, I make no pretension to convince people irresistibly of the fact of miracle, as they might be convinced that two and two are four, or that the less number is contained in the greater. The question cannot be decided by logic one way or the other. If any person, on calm reflection, is satisfied that for him miracle is incredible, no possibility exists of proving absolutely that he is mistaken. On the

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other hand, it is equally impossible to prove that he is *not* mistaken. As far as pure argument goes, the result is a pretty even draw. There is only one thing which can weigh down the balance in favour of the miraculous, and that is *an overwhelming impression of God as present in Jesus*. For a world in which we encounter the personal and redeeming presence of the Eternal is a world not only admitting of miracle, but actually revolving round a great, unspeakable miraculous Fact.

THE CHIEF COUNTER-ARGUMENT.

Two great obstacles lie across the path of a believer in the supernatural, but of these one is immensely more grave. This is the prepossession against miracle engendered in the modern mind by the methods of physical science. Physical science rightly finds it convenient to assume that the world is a huge machine, a machine which goes of itself and simply transmits energy from one point of space to another. We have only to elaborate this, and clearly it implies that nothing really *new* ever occurs, because the whole series of events and processes in the universe is only the clock-work of the cosmic machinery running down, spend-

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ing by the work it does the energy with which it originally was charged. If this is true, or anything the least like it, miracle is non-suited at the start. For everything which has ever taken place was, on this theory, contained implicitly in the primordial state of the world, and all that happens now is that what was *enfolded* in the world-elements at the beginning is gradually *unfolded*, by an inexorable fatal process with which nothing conceivable can interfere. A good many people not merely hold this theory of things; they consider it beyond dispute, and in accordance with it they prejudge every question about the supernatural. For them the possibilities of nature and of history are all fixed beforehand by this "deterministic" principle. What avails it to survey the evidence for our Lord's resurrection, when already we know that resurrection cannot be? Why listen to narratives regarding "answers to prayer"; have we not a principle in hand which discredits the very notion? So behind every objection to particular miracles stands this assumed truth, that miracles—like fairies or ghosts or witchcraft—are things so intrinsically impossible that nobody can believe in them who knows how to use his mind.

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But is this all-deciding maxim true? I should like to mention some reasons why we, as believers in the living God, should utterly reject it.

FREE MORAL ACTION.

I have spoken of the living God; now let us consider the living human soul. In praising or blaming an action, do we not imply that the agent was free to act as he did? Had he chosen, he could have acted otherwise. As Carlyle, in *Sartor Resartus*, puts it: "The true inexplicable God-revealing miracle lies in this, that I can stretch forth my hand at all." Everyone is conscious of a profound and far-reaching difference between the beating of his heart and the utterance of a falsehood. The one is done *for* us, the other *by* us. So, too, the resolute refusal despite all but irresistible pressure, to commit a crime or betray a friend is a fact which it is idle to attribute to the working of a machine-like necessity of circumstance. It is due, rather, to free spiritual energy liberated by the human will. There is no way of questioning this except on principles which would turn all history into a nature-process, in which nothing could have happened save what happened actually. Glorious

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self-sacrifice and unimaginable treachery came just like the weather; nobody was responsible. Is there a living man who believes this? Not one. But in that case the world is no machine; it is a place in which spiritual force acts freely. Human force does so. Why not, then, the great loving, living Force we call God?

THE REALITY OF PRAYER.

This is our second point. Here the question to be asked is: When I pray, do I have real fellowship with the Father, a fellowship in which the Divine Spirit and the human act and re-act upon each other; or do I simply influence *my own mind* in roundabout fashion, as a boy keeps his courage up by whistling, or warms his blood on a cold morning by running half-a-mile? No one who has ever really prayed can doubt which of these alternatives is true. We should stop praying instantly if we felt that nothing but our own mind was concerned in prayer. To pray is to be conscious of *communion*. Well, but this fact of communion with the Father breaks clean through that mechanical view of the world, which, as we have seen, turns it into a dead world; for it means that God is doing the wonderful new free thing of conversing with His

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human child, and is being answered by His child's faith. Such prayer, such genuine fellowship with God, is something which laughs at fate and its rigidities, and to see it so is to breathe a higher, freer air, in which the universe takes on the better aspect of a real training-ground for Divine sonship. It is a universe in which God is free to speak with man.

It is almost needless to add that the prayer-life of our Lord is unintelligible on the assumption that everything in the world has been fixed fatally, so that God can change nothing. Some one has said—Mr. Oldham, if I mistake not—that when we think of prayer, we at once think of its limitations; when Jesus thinks of prayer, it is as crowded with unimaginable possibilities. Is it not very significant that He Who alone in history not only saw but realized the ideal of humanity should have believed most strongly in the Father, and in the Father's power to help Him? He Who read life with clearest eyes was surest of God, "Who doth wondrous things."

THE FACT OF PROVIDENCE.

I have frequently observed that people who feel a difficulty in conceding miracle, yet cherish

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an ennobling faith in the Divinely-ordered government of the world. Take away this faith, and for them religion would lose all truth and value. Now I wish to raise the question whether we *can* hold that God really governs human life except as we assume supernatural action on His part. How can He direct the course of things except by somehow influencing its direction and movement, by initiating tendencies and events which would never have existed but for His Divine preferential action? Unless He does this, is He more than a spectator of history? Is He anything more important than a Supreme observer of events, Who marks the changes and forces of the world, but after all simply lets them take their own way? In that case, so far as the practical outcome is concerned, there might as well be no God. It was a great Christian philosopher who said, in words well worth pondering: "We have no right to speak of the world as being governed at all, if we regard it as but a system of effects and causes in which there are no free beginnings." *Free beginnings*—new starts—isn't that precisely what we want? I should be perfectly content to accept this as a description of miracle—a new begin-

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ning, traceable to the saving power of God. And the reasons seem to me tremendously strong for saying that new beginnings of this sort are essentially involved in the simple fact—recognized by many more than Christians—that the government of the world is in God's providential hand.

Here, however, a doubt may be felt. In speaking of God's Providence, it may be said, we surely need not hold that He actually changes the course of things. Is it not enough to say that He enables us to triumph by lifting us above the power of misfortune and temptation, strengthening the tempted soul inwardly, empowering the tried heart to believe that all things work together for good? Nothing in the world outside is altered; but *we* are altered, made braver, wiser, calmer. Now, that all this points to a great and priceless truth I should not dream of denying, but does it cover all the facts? If it does, must it not mean that there is no providence over the man who mistrusts God, or even hates Him? For obviously such a man does not possess this supposed inward, overcoming strength, this triumphant ability to see God's hand in misfortunes; he, therefore, on this

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hypothesis, is *not* subject to providence. And can we believe this? Surely our faith is that God rules over all. But if so, then His providential action operates *in the world*, not merely in our minds. He definitely affects the course of things; and that, we have seen, is totally unintelligible except as we suppose Him to intervene creatively in the interest of His wise designs. Now, miracle is but a short name for this creative intervention.

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

After all, the best type and illustration of miracle one can imagine is the experience of Divine forgiveness. There, in our own lives, you have that which neither nature nor human nature can explain in the very least. Ask a man to whom God has come thus as Saviour, blotting out the past and opening up the future, and he will tell you that something so ineffably great has happened to him, something so calculated to evoke adoring wonder, that the author of it can be none but God Himself. God has entered his life with revolutionizing power, and deprived sin of its capacity to expel him from the Father's presence. By the vision of Jesus—living, dying, risen—God has drawn near to

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him, laid a wonder-working hand upon his soul, and opened before him the gates of righteousness. But this is miraculous. It is God's invasion of life in ways inexplicable either by science or by common sense. It is the Father's interposition, to give us back our freedom and break the tyranny of the past.

CONCLUSIONS.

Miracle, then, is God's providing a new start. To our Father the past is not a fate. He is able to interpose, and deliver, and make all things new. The world and all its forces serve His will; they are part of the resources He utilizes freely, as we do our bodies, and He so utilizes them as to bring events to pass which startle and arrest men by their spiritual glory. Whether the wonderful thing we call miracle happens in the world or in our mind—whether it be the resurrection of Jesus or the pardon of iniquity—matters not at all, for the entire world lies in His hand.

Personally, I feel no need to go further. One requires no theory of the machinery (so to speak) by or through which a miracle is executed. God's methods are His own secret.

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It is by no means incumbent on us to say, for instance, that miracle breaks or violates natural law. The Divine power may supplement law without breaking it. I break no law of nature when I freely raise my hand; God breaks no law either, it may be, in bringing Jesus from the dead. All I know as a believer is that He did re-install Jesus Christ after death, and clothe Him with universal redeeming power, whereas natural law, left to itself, would have permitted the destroying forces of the grave to take their usual course. For us, this surely is enough.

Further, the foregoing argument is not meant to prejudge the question of the historic truth of any *particular* miraculous narrative in Scripture. This is a matter of evidence, regarding which every Christian man must form his own verdict. But at least the presence of supernatural powers in our own redeemed experience ought to clear our minds of all antecedent prepossessions against the possibility of the miraculous as such. These supernatural powers, to the reality of which we ourselves can testify, all of them cluster round, and flow from, the Person of Jesus Christ. In view of Him, and His re-creating mercy, we gain a new conception of the

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world. We learn that God is free, gracious, and almighty; and that nothing, whether life or death, things present or things past—be they laws of nature or of history—can avail to separate us from His love.

III.

The Problem of Guilt.

THESE short studies on great subjects dovetail into each other, I find, in a surprising fashion. In the preceding chapter we saw that moral human action represents one manifestation of "free force" to which miracle corresponds in the greater realm of the redeeming activity of God. It is freedom that makes us men, and, as men, possible sons of the Father. What we have now to mark is that the wrong use of freedom is sin, and that to sin belongs "guilt."

WHAT IS GUILT?

How do we know guilt when we see it? That looks a simple question, yet volumes have been written in the effort to answer it. Let us start with this, that guilt arises when an individual (or a society) fails in duty to God. It is best to put the matter thus negatively, in order to rope in the numerous people who have never done any great harm. These "faultily faultless" persons are guilty all the same; for, as was said the

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other day, "if we realised more fully that sin consists even more in what we leave undone than in what we do, it would hardly be possible for any man to be without sense of sin." Guilt is responsibility to God for failure to rise to the goodness He has shown us. He is entitled to call us to account, and as a fact He does call us to account, through the accusations or remonstrances of conscience. He does us the honour to consider each of us a responsible being, who might have kept clear of evil, and who can never get right except by facing up to guilt frankly and with humility.

Needless to say, the above statement would in many quarters be challenged outright. Objection would probably be raised from several distinguishable points of view. Thus one group argues that no proper responsibility can exist in a Juggernaut of a world like this, which staggers along, grinding out virtue and vice with equal facility and equal indifference. We need not repeat our former scrutiny of this "steam-engine" view of things. But it is at least observable that its advocates are in no way behind their neighbours in protesting, with passionate indignation, against shame or wrong

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inflicted on those they love. Their righteous anger blazes out upon the swindler and the assassin. They hold the wrong-doer accountable for his act; and we may well believe that God, if there be a God, does so to.

Once more, guilt has been denied on the more plausible ground that sin is good in the making, indeed a necessary stage in the development of character. Vice adds to the perfection of the world (it is not usually put quite so plainly), as shadow may do to the beauty of a picture or a transient discord to that of a phrase in music; why then should we blame ourselves for it, or believe that God will blame us? But this, for ordinary decent people, may safely be left to refute itself. To call lying, treachery, and impurity merely imperfect or undeveloped forms of goodness is either a discreditable speculative fad or a symptom of moral lunacy. The point is not that there may not be some sort of goodness in the evil, but that there *is* evil, greater than and submerging the good, and that *this* fact implies guilt.

And yet again, guilt has been repudiated because sin is held to be only weakness or infirmity. When a man falls in temptation, it

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is like a young tree falling in a storm. But this is an obviously inaccurate account of what happens when we go wrong. So far from sin being merely weakness, it is more often misdirected power. "When we sin, we literally sin *against* something. There is something which resists us, and which we have to overcome and push out of our way." We thrust aside the will of the Living God, which nevertheless appealed to us all the time we were forcing it away.

All these theories, then, go dead in the teeth of an unsophisticated conscience. In order to accept them, we have to distrust our moral perceptions. But if we distrust the utterances of the moral faculty, there seems to be no reason why we should ever trust our minds at all.

THE SCOPE OF GUILT.

Assuming this general idea of guilt, we must now ask how far it extends, and precisely what it covers. Well, probably most people who ever felt guilty have had the feeling awakened by an evil *act*. That was the trigger releasing the consciousness of sin. We are guilty, then, first of all, for the wrong things we have done. Nay, we need not have done them. If we have

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resolved to do them, and been stopped by accident (which we gradually learn to call Providence), the resolve was itself a sin which weighs on us as guilt.

But it is too often forgotten that we are just as responsible for wrong *feelings*. That sounds hard, but it is a matter as to which there can really be no doubt. Is sympathy only a matter of temperament, not a duty? Is it absurd for his friends to say of a man who is sullen and ungracious, gloomy and discontented: "He *ought not* to be like that"? Or may the man in question reasonably reply, when asked to be more kindly: "I am not built that way"? Of course not; there is an obligation in the case. "Good temper," someone remarks, "is not a mere fortunate accident, like robust strength or personal beauty, it is a virtue; and a bad temper is not a mere calamity, like a club-foot or a hare-lip, it is a vice.

But we must go deeper. We are guilty for our *character*. What troubles us first is the things we did; what troubles us most after a while is the persons we are. We are self-made men, all of us, and in the making we have destroyed ourselves. God did not create us such

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as we are now; the choices of the past did that. And the guilt of these choices is still upon us, because all conscious moral acts are stored permanently in the character they have formed.

DEGREES OF GUILT.

People who say that "all men are sinners" are liable to be charged with maintaining that all men are equally blameworthy. But if they are sensible, they don't maintain that in the least. Take young children. Here is a boy who has a wretched home; whose parents drink, fight, swear and steal. Is he much to blame for his budding hooliganism? Will God be hard on him, it is said, on account of his depravity? Surely it is a question of degree. God is hard on no one. But is it kind to treat the lad as totally irresponsible—in fact, as a nasty animal? Is not that most cruel and hopeless? How touch his better nature without assuming its existence, and therefore his real blameworthiness in some degree? How evoke and educate that better nature except as we lead him to condemn his old life, and thereby to understand, gradually no doubt, that God also condemns it?

How guilty such a lad is we cannot say, for

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we simply do not know. All we do know is that guilt depends on spiritual knowledge and on genuine freedom to give effect to this knowledge. That is, however, a truth addressed not nearly so much to sunken human beings, or the heathen, as to people like ourselves whose upbringing has been Christian. In fact, we find no hearts so guilty as our own. Can there be sin like that of one who has looked into Jesus' eyes, beheld His love, understood the wonder of it, and then in face of all betrayed Him? In our case, at least, it is vain to plead that environment has been too strong for us. The uplifting energies of men and women better than ourselves, of lives fed from the fountains of Christ, are round about us every day waiting to help and fortify our wills. We dare not plead that we were simply bound to fail. No man ever with a good conscience put down his sin to his neighbours' account. Let us employ this thought, of the sin-charged influence of society, not to excuse our failures, but to curb and solemnize our selfishness. When we are tempted, let us recollect that if we fail we make it harder for others to stand upright. We increase the fund of evil from which temptations flow.

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THE ANNIHILATION OF GUILT.

This chapter would be an uncommonly dismal one if it stopped short at this point; it would indeed have no right to appear in a Christian publication. Surely the Gospel did more for an imperfect world than rub in the painful fact that men are guilty. That could only weaken them still more. No; the one supremely important fact concerning guilt is that the love of the Father can remove it. He can destroy sin's power to expel us from His fellowship; He can give us a place as close to His heart as if we had never sinned at all. Some of the greatest words in the Old Testament are an exulting testimony to this. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Is. i. 18); "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity. . . . Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea" (Mich. vii. 18-19); "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins. . . . Sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it" (Is. xlv. 22-23). These men felt the Divine removal of guilt to be an astounding act of transcendent love and power—more start-

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ling than any convulsion of the world of nature. And it is so. It is as wonderful, as tremendous as the Passion of Jesus Christ—and as costly.

Here, too, the Cross is the key we must use. We must stand there, beneath the Dying One, if we wish to understand how much guilt means for God and man. Strange as it may appear, the spectacle of God's self-abnegating mercy in Jesus does not at first diminish the consciousness of guilt; rather it intensifies and deepens it. Not till then does sin show up in its true colours—its ingratitude, its folly, its mistrust, its unspeakable shame and meanness. Not till then does responsibility of it all come to lie heavy on the heart. That is our first look. But our second shows far, far more. It shows a love we do not earn, and can never repay, which comes to meet us, and bears our sin, putting it away by the sacrifice of itself. To see *that* is life from the dead.

“A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.”

If this be true, is it surprising that some people should believe the real consciousness of sin arrives only with the Christian experience? It is a pardonable exaggeration. Only after

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Christ has taken away our load do we learn how great it was. Only when we have owned our sin in His presence, then disowned it for ever, is the infinitude of our debt to Christ unveiled, and for the first time we gain the inspiration which can quicken and sustain loyal service in His behalf.

IV.

The Significance of Jesus Christ.

BY this title, let it be understood at the very outset, is meant the significance of Christ *for us*. What importance does He have for people with stained lives behind them, and in front the great chance and challenge of unselfish service? Our point of view is not that of the historian, or the student of character; it is exclusively religious.

Furthermore, the only right place and value for Christ must be the place He claimed. However convincing our estimate of Him might seem, if we discovered that it was not His, we should know at once we had got wrong. It is vain to give Christ a place He does not want. On one occasion a group of people went to Thomas Carlyle's house, desirous to honour him, taking with them a sort of gold medal, and were for making speeches. They were thankful to get out of his presence. That is a faint illustra-

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tion of Jesus' complete indifference to certain kinds of epithets and compliments and distinctions. The only thing which counts is His unshared power over our relationship to God, and we dare not put Him off with any kind of recognition except that which He asks for.

JESUS AS A MERE EXAMPLE.

Two principal estimates of Jesus are now before the world, both alike taken by earnest and sincere men. Probably none but earnest and sincere men are troubling much about Christ to-day. Let us ask regarding each view whether it is adequate, whether it is true to fact. Which of the Christs are real? Is He but an Example—an ideal Pattern, and no more? He shows me what I must be, and it remains for me to rise up and be it—is that sufficient? Will it save me; will it save my friend, if I tell him of it? Or is not the larger truth that Christ is also Redeemer?

Let us inquire. Never more than to-day has Jesus been vividly and arrestingly depicted as the epitome of perfect religious life—pure religion, joined with utter human brotherhood. He is the great Seeker for God, Who appeals to us to follow Him. He is pioneer in the new great field

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of faith, the Leader of men, pointing them on, past Himself, to God the Father. He is the Lover of men, calling us also to love; and when we think of that vast realm of devout victory and self-surrender we can say, with grateful veneration, "He was the first that ever burst" into the new world, taking possession of its whole calm privilege. Jesus is type and pattern of faith in Almighty God, and of triumph through faith.

There then is the picture, painted for us a hundred times by the finest scholarship, the most truth-loving and patient candour, and surely there is no one who does not feel its profound impressiveness. Apart from special details, it has the ring of truth about it, and unquestionably it represents an aspect of the Gospel which the Church has too often consented to ignore or suppress. We feel that we must have One Who will first trace the faultless copy-line we have to imitate, and that, trembling and uncertain as our writing on life's page may be, it would be far more wretchedly broken and wavering if *He* were not there for us to look at. We cannot, therefore, hear too much or too constantly about Jesus Christ the Example; our example not by

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reason of the variety of His experiences, for that life in Palestine was in one sense a narrow sphere, but rather in virtue of His purity of motive and the completeness of His self-abnegation. That one perfect and uninterrupted devotion to God's will furnishes, we feel, the sufficient and the enduring form of human conduct. Jesus is *that*, at all events. But is He no more than that? Is it justice to Christ, is it even wise or brave or fair to ourselves, if we stop there?

DIFFICULTIES OF THIS VIEW.

Let me suggest one or two reasons for answering in the negative, pretty decidedly. For one thing, if we make Christ an Example only, not a Saviour, we encounter the awkward fact that in point of history He is far away, and is getting farther away every year. He becomes simply an ancient Jew. Besides, a Pattern that is no more stands opposite to us, in what is really a passive attitude, looking at us, even compelling our gaze, but giving no help. It is like the lovely statue in Heine's dream—powerless, because without arms. And again, I think most people have felt that a perfect Example, simply and by itself, is positively discouraging. Any violin-player can

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recall the sickening sense of incompetence, and almost of despair, that fell upon him as he listened to a great and acknowledged master. Of course it may be said that a faultless model stimulates the beholder, because it shows what can be done; but this holds good only with a reservation. I am only encouraged if I can say : This man who has achieved perfection is able and also willing to make available for me the power by which he triumphed. Not merely is he prepared to instruct me; he can secure that his instruction will take effect, and that I shall participate in his mastery. To pass from figures to actualities Christ's life as Exemplar is a glorious incentive, *if He is also a Redeemer*. Otherwise it may be said to be full of moral danger, for it makes the enterprise of personal righteousness more desperate, more painfully and mockingly remote, even than before.

Moreover, if we are thrown back solely on the imitation of Jesus, it is important to ask what Jesus' most obvious characteristic is. What is it which strikes and startles us most as we watch Him? Surely it is that unhindered fellowship with God, that consciousness of peculiar Sonship, once for all expressed in the words : " No

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one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father save the Son and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him" (Matt. xi. 27). Can we imitate *that*? In all seriousness, can we approach God with this unbroken intimacy of communion, this directness and serenity of feeling, this assurance that we know the Father perfectly, with no cloud of sin between us? We cannot; and if so, let us frankly confess that the possibility of imitating Christ without more ado fails exactly at what is for religion the vital place. It will not serve. Let a man seriously contemplate Christ in prayer and longing, let him mark the self-reproach which overwhelms him as he does so, and the notion that he could confront God with an independent confidence of his own, on a par with Jesus, will vanish like vapour from his mind. As Professor Hogg puts it: "One cannot attempt honestly to copy the faith *of* Christ without being compelled to a faith *in* Christ. The faith of Christ as soon as the effort is steadily made to reproduce it in one's own daily conduct, reveals itself as immeasurably above any thing that anyone else achieves—so elevated is it, so discriminating in what it expects of the

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Father, so unfalteringly assured. . . . And so he who seeks to imitate the faith of Christ soon learns to distrust his own ideas of the Father, and to put his faith in Christ as the Revealer.”*

If, then, I am tempted to believe the imitation of Christ is all I want, let me stop and cross-question myself. Let me ask—Have you considered your own sinfulness? Do you realise that you can no more copy at will Jesus’ filial sense of God than you can the genius of Shakespeare? He had no bad conscience, and you have; and that single fact decides.

JESUS AS REDEEMER : HIS OWN CONVICTION.

There is, however, another view of Christ, the view which acknowledges Him as Saviour. On this interpretation He is not the Hero of faith and love merely; He is somehow able to communicate faith to us. He comes forth from the inner sanctuary; He takes us by the hand, with a grasp as authoritative as it is merciful; He leads us in to God. In Him we have the glorious news that the Father takes us up into His love, forgiving all our iniquities and healing all our diseases. He draws from us complete and

* *Christ’s Message of the Kingdom*, p. xiii.

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inevitable trust; notwithstanding our worthless lives, He enables us to reckon ourselves sons of God through Him. This, I have said, is a different view of Jesus; and regarding it we ought at least to note the significant fact that no man has ever been known, after experiment and after adoption of the attitude to Jesus which it indicates, to repudiate it as questionable or insufficient. On what grounds is this interpretation based?

First, there is Jesus' conviction of His own Redemptorship. What conclusion would a man reach who read the Gospels carefully for a week, without preconceived ideas for or against, but simply with the honest intention of making out Jesus' thought of Himself? Suppose he did it for a literary essay. When the week was over, would he say—I find that this Man took His place as one prophet amongst others, bringing a message about the Divine Holiness like Amos, or the Divine Love, like Hosea? Scarcely, I think. He could not say so after reading the second chapter of Mark, or the eleventh of Matthew, or the narrative of the institution of the Lord's Supper. The conclusion must be: Right or wrong, and so far as His own con-

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sciousness went, Jesus was the saving Representative of God, Who in His own Person brought grace and forgiveness, incorporating and presenting and living out in act and look and word and prayer the Holy Love of the Eternal. Not only so, right or wrong, such was His spiritual power over men, that in Him they felt God touching them, and their minds opened through Him to faith in the Father. In His life and death all the deepest and most torturing problems were solved for ever. He came forward to pardon sin, to console grief, to defy the cruel, destroying powers of nature, and to invite trust in Himself as the Mediator of everything that can be called salvation. They trusted Him, and the trust made them new creatures.

Now, as long as two threads of the Gospel story hang together, it is quite certain this was Christ's conviction about Himself. Remember, too, there is no evidence against Him except the evidence of those who have stood aloof from His message and refused to put it to the touch. The claim then stands, with all its implications. And one implication specially to be noted is *Jesus' personal sinlessness*. Only a sinless person can guarantee Divine pardon to the sinful.

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If there is such a thing as redemption, it must come through a Redeemer, Who Himself need not be redeemed. He cannot convey perfect wholeness to others or the unstained conscience, save as those who are first His own possession. Let us not suppose that the sinlessness of Christ puts Him at a distance from us. Occasionally we may fear this, but we are wrong. Sin is a dehumanising thing, and had Jesus fallen like the rest He would have been less a Man, not more. His hatred of evil could not have been the bracing and inspiring thing it is had there been defilement in His soul. To whom do broken men and frail women look for succour in their agony? Not to those who themselves have fallen from temperance or purity; to those, rather, who have felt the fierce heats of the furnace of temptation, yet have gained the victory. Poor as the analogy may be, at least it indicates that for us sinners a sinless Christ is the one fount of safety and power.

How many thousands there are now able to bear joyful testimony, out of an experience which brooks no questioning, that Jesus' claim to be Redeemer of the world is true! How many He

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has made immovably sure of God! Ask them how it happened, and their story comes out something like this. Almost without our knowing, certainly at first without our wishing it, His power and majesty came home to us. Even when we did not see how we could be saved, we grew to trust His confidence that He could save us. And all the time it was the living God that met and touched us. "God in Christ"—this is what we said as we looked upward, and thought and prayed and thought again; "God in Christ is there, and is there for me!" Doubtless we have often lost that clear assurance, but just as really by employing the proper means we have regained it. When we have sought Jesus in the New Testament; when we have striven to follow His footsteps; when we have put up a real fight with sin; when we have made leisure to pray; when we have kept close to the best Christians we knew; most of all, when we have helped those who needed us—then the moral conditions of the old certainty have been newly fulfilled.

Here is the first pillar of assurance that Jesus saves: He Himself was conscious of saving power.

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JESUS AS REDEEMER : THE CHURCH'S LIFE.

A second pillar is the fact that nothing except belief in Christ as Redeemer keeps the Church faithful and effective. Some one may, of course, say : " Well, I don't know much about Church history ; you may be right, but you have it all your own way. It is impossible for me to verify your statement." But in fact the opportunities of verification are open to every one. To begin with, we have the New Testament in our hands. Probably we all agree—whatever our views of inspiration—that if there was ever a classic Christian experience, and therefore an effective Christian witness, it was that out of which came the New Testament. Where lies the faith which fills every page of Gospels and Epistles with life and light and power of such amazing quality that across the centuries they have daily kindled an answering flame in human hearts, so rending the fetters of selfishness and sin and wrong that the soul has escaped, like a bird out of the snare of the fowler? What gives the New Testament this magic, radium-like secret of undying energy? Just this faith that " Jesus is Lord." Just the fact that it was written by men who found blessedness and joy in gathering their fellows

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round them by argument and appeal and promise, to hear the wonderful revolutionizing message: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." If they had not had *that* to preach, could the Apostles have touched hearts and changed lives? Why, they tell us plainly, and we can see for ourselves, that apart from the Redeemership of Christ they would have been as visionary and as pessimistic as their contemporaries. Sometimes in colliery districts, where houses stand over deep pits and galleries, one has seen the fabric held together firmly by a great steel bar passing through the walls, and clamped with iron bolts at either end. Well, the spiritual life of the earliest Christians is like that. Beneath their feet lay a hollow civilisation; the walls of old belief all round were tottering; but the single conviction that something great had happened—that in Christ, God the Saviour had come to men—this held their life together unshakenly, and made them a strong refuge for the doubting, the weary, the sin-laden, the despairing.

Another source of verification is the Church life of our own time. It is mere truth to say that no Church to-day possesses a strong con-

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tagious life which does not give Jesus the central place, or which has ceased to look to Jesus with adoring faith as the Way to the Father. We can tell by instinct when we are in company with people in whom Christian religion is burning, who sing the great hymns rejoicingly; and on such occasions we invariably discover that the belief which unites and inspires them, and charges them with hope and love for others, is trust in Jesus only—

“Jesus, Thou joy of loving hearts,
Thou fount of life, Thou light of men.”

In philosophy, in science, or in politics we are nowadays deeply impressed by a principle that works. Does it *do* things? we ask. Apply that touchstone to the Gospel. The test of the message telling of a Redeemer Christ is its actual production of changed lives, which change other lives in turn. Christ is Saviour, and not merely Example, for He saves multitudes who in imitation would have been miserable failures.

“GOD WAS IN CHRIST.”

One point more. When a man places himself by conscious act in presence of the Christ Who looks out of the New Testament, drinking in life from the thought of Him, always, underneath

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these new feelings and resolves, rises the sense that this Redeemer, in a peculiar way, is God's gift. More than that, He is a gift in which God gives *Himself*; for here if anywhere the old maxim is in place, that "the gift without the giver is bare." We don't want a Christ who could be received without receiving God; and God, knowing this infinitude of our desire, came to us personally in Jesus, to be our own. The Man of Nazareth and Calvary is not merely the perfect Saint, offered by humanity to God, but first and foremost the Son of the Father, given to us, at the last given for us. He is *the* Son, standing by Himself unrepeatably, for every true heart understands that God resembles man in this respect, that He cannot give Himself fully more than once.

"God in Christ," Christ the unspeakable gift of the Father—when we stand off a little from these thoughts, I think that by degrees, as with a great picture of sea or mountain, our gaze involuntarily travels out into the infinite before and after. Christ the gift of God—why, then, there must always have been in God the fulness bestowed in Jesus; and we begin faintly to apprehend what the pre-existence of Christ means, His

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eternity, the Divine sacrifice implied in His being here. It means at least this, that God then gave what He had possessed within Himself before, long before, always.

Christ the gift of God—then, having once being given, He is given for ever. Nothing in the world's indifference or hostility can ever lead to his being recalled; in the old phrase, the gifts of God are without repentance. For us it is difficult to allow men a second chance, and if they disappoint us again we cast them off without mercy. But the Father's mind is different. His love and power are bestowed in Jesus for good and all. So I dimly begin to understand the significance of the Living Christ. He died once; His life in Palestine was ended. But death did not silence or remove Him, for the Divine gift never could be cancelled. There was no withdrawal. Jesus Christ, speaking outwardly in His Word, and inwardly by His Spirit in the heart, is still the same Human Person in Whom God approaches us, rebuking us by holiness, comforting us by love, supporting us by strength won in the sore, long conflict He undertook in our behalf. Over that Divine gift time has no power. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

Forgiveness and the Cross.

IN the preceding chapter we studied the significance of Jesus, alike in history and experience; but it cannot be too emphatically said that the only Jesus Whom we know ended His life by crucifixion. Apart from the Cross, He is nothing but a name. What is more, when He saw death approaching He told the men round Him that it had to do with *sin*. But not His own sin. In that case, the only relation to sin His death could have was that of the pre-condition which secured *forgiveness*; this was the blessing most profoundly needed by the sinful, and most passionately longed for in the Old Testament. "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?"—it was people who felt like that, or might come to feel like that, whom Christ had in mind when He brought forgiveness and the Cross into some kind of indissociable connexion.

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TWO PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

But first it may be said: Is forgiveness a necessity? May not the problem of this chapter be totally unreal? It is unreal, of course, if we are helpless victims of heredity and environment and education, as little responsible for character as the barometer for climate. As to that, I need only say that every literature in the world confesses there is something awfully wrong with human life, and that humanity is to blame. Latin poetry, for instance often sounds a note of sheer despair, and the most modern of modern writers are perpetually repeating that what the world needs is a new type of manhood. There is amongst men to-day a piercing sense of neglected duty, particularly of the duty to treat each other decently. Once we have got so far, the question whether this all-round failure requires to be forgiven will only trouble those for whose minds the reality of God is doubtful. There is no greater calamity than an overclouded sense of God, for its direct result is an impaired feeling of personal unworthiness, which only vanishes when His encompassing and arraigning presence is felt anew.

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Another difficulty is due to the fear, or in some cases the definite conviction, that forgiveness is impossible. Is not spiritual law as inexorable as physical, and what can this mean except that the incurred consequences of sin cling to us for ever? What conceivable power could lift off the burden? Nothing remains but that with unconquerable soul we should carry it on to the bitter end, whatever its weight, without puling or whining. Now, in this protest there is something noble. It expresses the human instinct that there can be no tampering with the tremendous sanctions of moral law. When we talk about forgiveness, we mean nothing so foolish and cruel as a cheap or feeble remission of all penalty for wrong-doing. If you wish to harm the tempted, say to them there is nothing so terrible in sin after all, that its harvest of misery never need be reaped. No argument like that to push them right over the brink! But while the objection has an element of nobleness, it is none the less mistaken, and for the same reason as the first objection: it forgets God, His absolute Love and Power and Freedom. In the parable of the Prodigal Son it is the father who accounts for the fact of pardon; had the father

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been dead, the wanderer might have perished in the far country, or come back to find the old home desolate. And so with us. If God is not as Christ revealed Him, it is futile to talk about forgiveness, for there is no one to whom we can say: "Father, I have sinned before Heaven and in Thy sight." But if Christ was true, if there is a living God Who loves and acts, then the forgiveness of sin is the most blessed and the most stupendous possibility in life.

Still, is there any strong or indissoluble tie between our pardon and the death of Jesus? That is our problem. Well, let us begin with a very significant fact—the force of which grows greater the more nearly it is considered—the fact that people on the outlook for redemption have always connected the two things. What has drawn men to Christ—often, remember, before they apprehend the whole of His deep secret? What has led them to grope round and feel for Him with that vague, wistful, indefinable expectation? It is that they dimly feel He has undertaken to deal with their most hopeless difficulty, and believing somehow that He can be trusted to do what He undertakes, they look up into His face, and read about His Passion, and stand be-

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fore the Cross longing that He would help them. They feel this even before they have understood; and afterwards the truth of their involuntary premonition stands out clear, as they realise that what they as sinners should have suffered, He suffered for them. Is there any reason why we should not find redemption in the Cross like our predecessors? There must be pure water where so many have knelt to drink, and risen with new light in their eyes. Why should the spring have failed for us?

FORGIVENESS HUMAN AND DIVINE.

Formerly it was customary to accentuate the difference between God's forgiveness and ours, but for the moment it will suit us better to emphasise the likeness. To interpret the Cross, let us ask what happens when one man pardons another. Of course I mean a case of real intensity, with something terrible to forgive—say the treachery of friend to friend, implying bitter pain and disgrace for the injured person, or a loss of happiness never to be regained here. We may fill in the details from something we have read or possibly even seen. And we are supposing that by a self-conquest which the

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bystanders feel to be sublime the injured one actually forgives the injurer, knits up the threads of old friendship, lives heart to heart as formerly. What is involved in that? What has to take place before it can be accomplished and realised in a fashion morally worthy? Three points may be noted.

First, *sin is dealt with as a great reality*. For these two it is the saddest reality in all the world, which they know must be openly recognised in their attitude to each other. If their friendship is to have any depth or sweetness, there can be no huddling it up, no poor jests; they must have the thing out into the daylight, and look at it straight, whatever the pain. Let it stay hidden, lurking down beneath the surface, and it will inevitably continue to poison their personal relationships. So the knife must go in, even if some nerves have to quiver pitifully, and the black, hateful object must be forced up into view.

So, if there is to be reconciliation for us, God must be entirely open with us regarding sin. We must be shown the one perpetual overshadowing barrier between Father and children; we must be set face to face with the sheer realities of rebellion and mistrust and lovelessness, as they

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flout God, and make brotherhood a sham, and debase the soul; and the confession must be wrung from us, by demonstration not violence, that we sin exactly like that. No forgiveness is conceivable otherwise. No arbitrary act on God's part condoning the past would be any good, let alone a conspiracy of silence on ours. In the moral universe, progress depends on facing facts. A doctor speaks out to the man who consults him about a cold and is really consumptive, and God speaks out to the world just as plainly regarding the deepest source of bondage and misery, and lays his finger on the secret. However it is done, we have to be convinced of sin.

We are convinced of sin, quite inescapably, in the Cross where Jesus died. The Cross is the object-lesson for all time as to sin's real character, once superficial wrappings are torn off. Sin is what takes Jesus Christ, and scourges Him, and spits upon His sacred face, and nails Him up to die of pain. That is sin, *and we are the sinners.* The same kind of selfishness and suspicion and grudging envy and callous neglect and hard injustice of which we are guilty, were blazing in the hearts of those

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who scoffed at the dying Lord. As we read the Passion-story, some secret shameful chords of sympathy with the haters of Christ vibrate inwardly, even when we loathe ourselves for it. That gives a glimpse of our real self. That searches conscience to its depths, and makes jaunty notions of sin impossible, at least so long as we remember Calvary, and Christ's foes, and our own identity with their spirit. I don't at all say that till a man has profoundly acute impressions of his own ill-desert, he cannot apprehend God's love in Christ, clinging to it with reverent confidence; but I do say, without hesitation, that if he is ever to understand forgiveness—its blessedness, its wonder, the overcoming power it conveys—he must have caught sight of the truth that there is something guilty and tragically real for God to forgive, in which he is personally involved. And the great Divine means for making that ineffaceable impression is the Cross. Jesus' death revealed sin—*our* sin—by exposing its treatment of the holiest Love ever beheld upon the planet, and by permitting it to unmask itself, God condemned human evil more awfully and more effectually than if He had there and then obliterated the world.

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PARDON COMES THROUGH PAIN.

Secondly, *forgiveness is imparted at the forgiver's cost.* Return for one moment to our instance of transcendent pardon. Some one has lost honour and happiness through a friend's betrayal, yet has risen up to the nobleness of forgiving the wrong. Think of his experience as he makes the great resolve. I say it is an experience of agony. In that creative moment it is as if a sword pierced through his soul, with nearly unendurable pain. It is not the pain of a bad man, writhing over a hateful duty; it is the pain of a good, a god-like man, to whom in the very article of forgiveness the shame and evil of his friend's sin comes home as infinitely repulsive and infinitely in need of cleansing; and he takes it as it were upon himself in a passion of substitutionary sympathy, submerging it in holy love. The finer his moral nature, the deeper will be the suffering.

Let us follow this principle into the sphere of personal relationships at their very highest. At Calvary, He against Whom all sin is done suffers in the very act of making forgiveness real. There, too, pardon means agony. This, I need not say, is not intended as a short and easy

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interpretation of Jesus' death, for nothing of the kind is possible. In reading *Othello* or *King Lear* we are conscious of that inscrutable and catastrophic collision of good and evil which we specifically describe as tragedy. And there is tragedy likewise in the Cross—a dim spectacle of agonising conflict, such that we can only stand afar off, beholding the great sight. When the Son of God comes forth from that struggle, His robes are red with blood. "Sin" as Philipps Brooks put it, "sin is a horrible strong, positive thing, and not even divinity grapples with him and subdues him except in strife and pain." What pain signified to God in Christ, we cannot tell. This only we can discern, that Christ paid the price of dread agony when He closed with evil, telling out all the Father's mind, expiating the sin He forgave.

"Thou must love me Who have died for thee,"

is what He says to us, as He comes out with victory in His hand.

Surely an answer lies here for one difficulty often felt regarding Atonement. People say—Is not the very idea of Atonement base and cowardly? It implies (does it not?) that we are

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to sneak out of our sins and leave Jesus Christ to bear the brunt. And yet consider: is not vicarious suffering for the unworthy the recognisably best thing in all noble life? Some one pointed out the other day that "the type of morality towards which mankind is moving is a type in which evil will be quickly and keenly resented, but in which instead of fierce and bitter punishment of the sinner those sinned against will rather suffer on his behalf." Frequently enough, the man who finds difficulty in Christ's suffering for him, and bearing sin, is the very person you will discover down in the slums, toiling and planning there for broken lives; shouldering a neighbour's load in pure sympathy. He would stare at being told—You are doing an immoral thing in helping thieves and drunkards; you are not justified in sharing their life and taking hold of their burden. Let them bear it alone. Whatever is right, *that*, he knows, is wholly wrong. And shall we forbid God to do what is done by the best men? Who will venture to tell Him that this service of the guilty—rendered so gladly by friend for friend, by mother for child—is impossible and wrong for Him? Who will set limits to what Fatherhood can be?

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As in every case where a great forgiveness is imparted, there was in the Cross a great agony, an awe-inspiring pain which corresponded to the awfulness of the sin forgiven. That death of Jesus is a window into the heart of the Eternal; what Christ was in history, God is all the time. Thenceforward His pardon is above the suspicion of indifference to evil. Forgiveness is always costly, and here the price was paid not to God, but by God, in His Son—a price necessary to exhibit His nature of perfect, holy love. This explains why the awe, the mystery, the majesty of redemption breaks upon us at Calvary, until our poor self-complacence is swallowed up and lost. All is forgotten, as we bow down there, except the certainty that we are forgiven, and amazement that it should be so, and adoring praise of Him Who pardoned at so dear a price. Everything in God is great, but nothing is so great as His way of blotting out transgression.

RECEIVING FORGIVENESS.

Thirdly, *forgiveness can only be received through suffering*. In the example from which we started the pardoned betrayer has his own

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agony to undergo. If a spark of nobleness is left his eyes will open to the horror of his act, as also to the goodness and innocence against which he acted; and to realise that will be perhaps the greatest pain he has ever felt. You will search in vain for an instance of noble pardon—between man and man, between man and woman—where this suffering, inseparable from the situation, was not endured. No more moving sight has been than a strong nature in tears; tears that come when words are powerless; tears that go where words cannot follow; and if they ever are in place, no time to shed them like the hour of forgiveness. No safeguard, either, which will compare with that memory.

Turn once more to the Cross. I ask—Is it quite easy to accept God's pardon? On the other hand, should we not be ashamed, as well as a little afraid, if we found it very easy? These are two chief difficulties in this region of experience, yet it is possible to perceive ways in which the death of Jesus, when we have realised its meaning, enables us to overcome them.

First, to accept God's pardon of sin is sometimes nearly impossible. Pride steps in. We will not come with empty hands; we feel no

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sorrow for the past; or what we feel is desperate remorse, not really penitence. What is going to help us? What is going to thaw the frozen inward sensibility, which is making us more and more miserable and reluctant; what can soften and unseal the springs of humility and gratitude and hope? Surely there is nothing like the sight of the dying Lord, Who gave Himself for us. That floods the heart with melting and purifying pain, the uplifting and emancipating passion in which we taste the knowledge of His glorious love and our worthlessness, and in that knowledge are enabled to break with self and cast ourselves down into the depths of His mercy. The pain is for us, as it were, a sacrament of reconciliation.

Yet, secondly, it is possible to take Divine pardon too coolly and too lightheartedly, and against this peril also the vision of the Crucified is a safeguard. We need such a pardon as can avert our wills from sin. It must be a pardon which has something in it, vast and towering and silencing—high as heaven, deep as the unfathomed sea. If I am to be forgiven in a fashion which will not nourish the seeds of evil in me, but will demonstrate the fixity of God's

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holiness and the immensity of His love, then I need a suffering Redeemer, in Whose experience the awfulness of sin is written with fire. If the past can prove anything, it proves that for this we have to come to Jesus' Passion, and see Him entering for our sake into that horror of deep darkness which had to be,* if the misery and wrong of our lives was to be terminated. It is a solemn sight; it is a breaking and subduing sight; but until we look at it we are shirking the deepest of all experiences, and in the look, thank God, there is everlasting life.

We cannot ever exhaust the wonder of the fact that, despite His purity, Jesus Christ the Righteous became thus one with sinners. It is related of Dr. Rainy, a great Scottish Christian, that once, as he walked home from College, he was accosted by a drunken and brutal fellow, who begged from him, then cursed him as he passed on. And Rainy stopped short, laying hold of the street railing beside him, sick in heart, almost sick in body, at the feeling that he too was personally implicated by social responsibility in this poor creature's life, its

*Cf. Henry Sloane Coffin, *Social Aspects of the Cross*, p. 12 ff.

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shame and emptiness. That almost unmanning thought he could not disown. And can we forget how Jesus acknowledged the responsibilities of grace? He took the first step; He refused to stand apart; He numbered Himself with the transgressors. Redemption was a problem worthy of God, and in what happened to Jesus, His solution is provided. The breach yawning between right and wrong could only be healed by God exerting Himself to the utmost, and throwing the whole strength of His nature into the chasm. In that dread act the strength of man's sin and of God's love was tried, and victory remained with love.

VI.

Conversion.

IN this chapter I shall use conversion as equivalent to the conscious beginning of the Christian life. Its essence is religious; that is, it signifies a voluntary change in our relation to God rather than the reformation or readjustment of conduct and moral temper. Of course, in many cases, the religious change involves likewise a thorough-going moral revolution, in which bad habits are discarded and replaced by others; and something of the kind there must always be. Things cannot remain as formerly where Christ has entered. Moral transformation, however, is not conversion, but its result.

Again, by conversion we mean, or at all events we ought to mean, something that all Christians, without exception, will feel is true of them. We are not entitled to narrow it down to a series of prescribed and stereotyped experiences which occur in a fixed order and reach a fixed point of

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intensity. As we shall see, this does not in the least imply that "conversion" is a quite vague term. There is absolutely nothing vague in the idea of "turning towards God." Our personal attitude to the question may be vague, so that we should not know whether to call ourselves Christians or not; but conversion, in the New Testament sense, is as definite as God or man.

TO WHAT IS CONVERSION DUE?

Conversion, the spontaneous act in which we turn to God and accept His love, is evoked by a new perception. The perceived truth may be in a sense old, and even familiar, but there is a new sort of apprehension which at first staggers us by the greatness of its meaning. The reality of God our Saviour "peals through us" for the first time, and indifference to His gift and claim suddenly becomes a moral impossibility. We are changed by seeing. And it is God Himself Who is seen—seen in a new amazing light which shows Him willing to receive sinners and to be our Friend, seen as holy, yet forgiving. The influence which brings us to see Him thus may be the Christian testimony of a preacher, or with more probability it may be the appeal of Christian lives

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in contact with our own. But in either case all goes back at last to Jesus. It is because Jesus lived and died that this new presentation of God, whether in character or witness, can be given at all; it is only because Jesus still is all He was, that, when given, it has power to reach and subdue the soul. When in humble confidence we consciously claim God as He is present in Jesus, casting ourselves on Him for all we need and hope, then, in the language of the New Testament, we "convert." We turn round, and life takes a new direction.

Clearly, however, there must be within us that which the new perception of God can challenge, and to which, in a moral sense, it can be fastened. If conversion is neither caprice nor magic, we must offer to the forces producing it a really intelligible point of attachment. And we do. For one thing, the soul and God are linked by a deep kinship. As Browning says :

" Though He is so bright and we so dim,
We are made in His image to witness Him."

Something in us echoes, even if faintly, to His call. But more; besides this original and inalienable nature, we have each had a history, and God has been in the history as well. To

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quote one of the best recent books : " The worst of us at his very worst has something in him to which God can appeal—something akin to God, round which (in a land like this) gather thoughts and feelings that in their multitude and their variety have constituted a sub-conscious life. . . . How constantly in the history of conversions we meet the statement that a thought of home was awakened, of a parting word spoken years before, of a text learned at school, of an old ideal forgotten—it is these and such as these that Christ speaks to, brings into life and power again, and uses as the weapons of His victory."* At Christ's touch, ideas, feelings and beliefs that were dead and cold become hot and live, and aims are installed at the very centre of the mind which previously were far out on the circumference. At Jesus' summons the best things in our past rise up and claim us. It is not in a vacuum the matter is decided; whether suddenly or by degrees, it is in the midst and by the instrumentality of old submerged interests of the bygone years.

HOW DOES CONVERSION REVEAL ITSELF?

If we believe in God and know what sin is, we shall at once understand that conversion *must*

* Steven, *The Psychology of the Christian Soul*, pp. 181-2.

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become manifest in two ways. These two ways are opposed, yet inseparable. As we have seen, to convert is to turn round. Well, that means facing away *from* one object or set of objects and facing to another. If we turn to the Father, Who has touched us, by that act we turn from sin, from self—from the old life anyhow, whatever description you choose to give of it. In other words, there is faith and also there is penitence. Faith is seeing God as He meets us in the life and person of Jesus, or in influences ultimately due to Jesus, and opening will and heart to what we see. But how can anyone see Christ thus and not perceive that He is irreconcilably opposed to sin—all sin, *our* sin—and that if we would stand on His side we must share His feeling on the subject? Attachment to Jesus, therefore, means nothing if it does not mean breaking with the old life He cannot share, and this is penitence. It has recently been said in a rather well-known utterance that modern healthy-minded persons have ceased to worry about their sins; which if true would point to penitence being out of date. I don't know what we should say about a man that never worried about falling out with his best friend, who had laid him under vast obligations.

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But I fancy we should not hold him up for imitation. Well, sin is just falling out with God, and if God is like Jesus, perhaps a little worrying about sin will not seem much amiss. Is it not most probable that our sense of the gravity of sin will deepen as we know better the Love against which all sin is done?

In every instance of conversion, then, faith and penitence meet and intermingle. But in what proportion they will appear, no one can tell beforehand. Some men waken first to righteousness and its glory; they lay hold upon the triumphant forces of goodness and unselfish attainment present in Jesus, and in His name and power they fling themselves into the fight against wrong and injustice, against pain and need. What wins them is the moral supremacy of Christ. He becomes their Leader and Ally, and in the great companionship imperceptibly there springs up a profounder sense of personal unworthiness. Others, frequently those who have been consciously abandoned to sin, flee to Christ as their Deliverer from guilt and ruin, and the result is a violent and radical alteration in the dominating tendencies of their life. All varieties lie between these two points, not to

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speak of rarer forms on which I cannot touch. But wherever Christian life exists, it will be admitted that it had a beginning in consciousness; and, alike in inception and in progress, it is characterized by faith in God and repentance towards our Lord Jesus Christ.

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS?

Let us recall the principle enunciated at the very outset, namely, that conversion is taking a new personal relationship to God. That springs from and also yields the assurance of God's love, with a thousand and one priceless consequences in daily life and work. This knowledge that in Christ we are sons of God is the fountain of all. But psychologists tell us there are three fundamental attitudes of the human mind—that of knowing, of feeling, of willing or striving. Let me briefly point out how each of these is modified by the attainment of personal Christianity.

First, we perceive new meanings in life, a new insight is reached into the purposes of things. By faith we now *know* that all things work together for good; we *know* that we are here to learn the will of God, and serve our fellows, and build up Christian character; we *know* that the

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grave is not the end, but Christ has brought immortality to light.

Second, our feeling changes, and along with it our sense of value. We come (by degrees, of course, and often desperately slow degrees, but still we do come) to like what formerly we disliked and perhaps even despised. It is not that the capacity of pleasure is damped down; rather it is quickened and freshened by being associated with objects which never can grow stale. Who ever complained that Jesus Christ, on better acquaintance, fell off sadly in interest? So far from this, religious feeling stays on and deepens to the end. It remains when all else has fled.

“ In the hour of death, after this life's whim,
When the heart beats low, and the eyes grow dim,
And pain has exhausted every limb—
The lover of the Lord shall trust in Him.”

Third, we gain a new inward power. Whatever Christians wrangle about, here is one thing about which they are all sure. They are all sure that the man who turns to God, renouncing self for love unspeakable, is lifted steadily to conquest in the moral strife. When Börne said “Christianity is the religion of all poor devils,”

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he testified amongst other things to the fact that the Gospel does more than make good men better; it makes bad men good. To do *that* has been the crux of religion and morality. But whenever men take the way of conversion, when in faith and hope they commit themselves to God, the thing is done.

THE VARIED TYPES.

All Christians are converted in the sense that they are really in fellowship with God now, while yet they did not drift into it. For unless personal religion is like a nature process, seizing us as influenza might, without our having the least sense of what was going on, a day must arrive when we choose to take it in earnest. And this is conversion. A few years since a distinguished judge defined "wilful" action as action "done deliberately, intentionally, not accidentally or by mistake or inadvertence, *so that the mind was going with the act.*" May not this be applied to the religious choice, to the making up the mind for God? As it has been put: "The most carefully nurtured boy or girl comes to an hour in which the Gospel cannot be unconsciously inherited, but must be deliberately accepted as the

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supreme good and supreme responsibility of the free and conscious spirit, or as deliberately renounced."

Within the limits vital to the case, however, there is infinite variety. Conversions occur which may be described as sudden, but for others the experience is protracted. And not all religious changes are accompanied by the full consciousness of their tremendous importance. But when all is said, the choice of life cannot be broken up into little bits. However long may have been the underground processes of preparation, I suspect all great resolutions that change life have to be abrupt. There has to be a leap at the last, though there may be a run before we leap. Some day or other we must say "Yes" or "No" to God, and mean it, as a woman must when sought in marriage by a lover. Conversion is saying "Yes."

The place of crisis in religion is now very much more widely admitted than it used to be. Poets like Keats, patriots like Garibaldi, statesmen like Bismarck had their call, and in a great hour answered it. There was a decision from which no going back was possible. So too in religion nothing can happen if the man will not pull himself together, look straight at himself

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and righteousness, and launch his life into the life of God. Drifting or insincerity is fatal. To call men to such decision is one great aim of the society of redeemed men, for, as *Ecce Homo* puts it, the article of conversion is the article by which the Church stands or falls.

VII.

Immortality.

CHRISTIANITY has much to say concerning Death. One minor proof of the felt significance of the subject is that the noun, "death," occurs 102 times in the New Testament. On any view, Death is of enormous importance for human character and destiny, whether we look upon it, as Christians do, as the darkling gateway to God's presence, or as simple annihilation. Let us not forget that multitudes do regard it as annihilation. Open what literature you will, and Death emerges as the last sad enigma, the inconceivable evil, before which men bow either in dumb stupor or with cries of hopeless and impotent resentment. "It is a sad thing for a man to lie down and die," said Dr. Johnson, uttering one of those elemental commonplaces which only have to be considered quietly to put an end to jesting. Yes; death as

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men know it is the focus of all tragedy, if it be surveyed apart from faith. Apart from faith, life is much like a burning cigar—the end no more than a tiny ash-deposit.

Furthermore, death is singular in this respect, that it is the sole form of suffering no one can escape. We do not all lose our health, or have our house burned down, or our money made away with; but we must all die. Even St. Paul trembled now and then at the thought of his latter end. It is mere sentimentality—it marks a temper, that is, which shirks plain fact—to refuse to look at Death. Christianity alone tells us it can be so looked at as to be triumphed over in trustful anticipation; nay more, it can be accepted as the final earthly task appointed by the Father. No religion has said more terrible things about Death than ours; no religion, therefore, has a better right to be heard on the victory over Death vouchsafed to all believers.

IMMORTALITY MORE THAN RESURRECTION.

I suggest that “immortality” is a better word for our purpose than “resurrection,” for this reason amongst others, that it is considerably more precise. Resurrection is relative to the

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body, since no spirit can be buried; and, once we give up the confused notion that the glorified spirit will re-assume the very body laid in the grave, composed of the same particles—a notion which St. Paul explicitly discards (1 Cor. xv.)—we need not retain or at least emphasise a word reminiscent of that old mistake. “Resurrection” is right, of course, if we merely wish to insist that future life will be life in a body. Certainly we can think of it no otherwise.

“The eternal form will still divide
The eternal soul from all beside.”

What we really want to assert is immortality—the existence after death of the redeemed personal life, both inward and outward, in lasting union with God. “Resurrection” is better kept to denote our Lord’s rising “on the third day.”

THE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF IMMORTALITY.

In all Scripture, the most piercing word on our theme is Jesus’ answer to the questioning Sadducees: “As touching the dead, that they are raised, have ye not read how God spake, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the

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God of the dead, but of the living : ye do greatly err " (Mark xii. 26-7). What does Jesus mean to say? He means—and He exemplifies the truth from far-off times that he to whom God's fellowship has been given is one with Him for ever. To think that He could hold communion with His children, could bless and lead them for a whole life-time, only to leave them in the dust, is to deny outright what we have found Him to be—faithfully and unchangeably Redeemer. So that the negation of immortality is the negation of the Fatherhood. It is the negation, in particular, of the Father's illimitable power. He could not part with the soul that clung to Him, and we, if we know His love, need not fear lest we be called upon to part with *Him*. Death cannot ever touch those who are folded on the bosom of the Eternal. Now, we have here the bed-rock, the final and immovable religious certainty on which Christian faith in another life will always rise. It is the foundation even of faith in the resurrection of Jesus Himself, as St. Peter's words show plainly : " God raised Him up, having loosed the pains of death, because *it was not possible* that He should be holden of it " (Acts ii. 24). Why not possible? Because God

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is God. Because God is Father, and Jesus the Father's Son, there was between them a bond too strong for death. And Jesus is the crowning instance of a principle which holds true also for His brethren, and which pledges eternal life to all who can say, in the last sinking of mortality: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

The same great strain is heard in the Epistles. Death is the very first item in St. Paul's list of things which he is persuaded shall not be able to separate us from the love of God. What the resurrection of Jesus does for this fundamental religious conviction is not so much to prove it—you need not prove an intuition—as to furnish a decisive illustration of it. Yet although the resurrection of Jesus is not needed to prove immortality—long before He died Jesus knew He would live again—it does add unspeakably to its hold upon our minds. It is one thing to know that spring is coming, because the almanac tells us so; surely it is another, some sweet April day, to feel upon the brow a gust of vernal air, with its mystic fragrance, telling that spring *is here*. So even before Jesus, men had lived to whom God gave the assurance that they were His

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eternally. Yet they were few, and their trust flickered like a candle's flame. But the experience of Jesus revealed immortality in being. What happened on Easter morning proved for good and all that over this world of graves there rises the almighty love of God. "Death—that great fact—is not the greatest or final fact. There are facts greater, deeper, more significant even than Death—facts about the nature of man, the character of God, the story of Christ—and it is upon these facts that the sure faith in the life immortal stands.

OTHER THOUGHTS OF IMMORTALITY.

We do not forget the arguments of philosophy. Philosophy has pointed to the general belief in another life, to the necessity for a future world to redress the balance of earthly pain and sorrow, to the constitution of man as obviously made for the infinite and divine. But I think most people are now agreed that the function of such arguments is not to demonstrate immortality to the unbelieving, but to analyse and interpret an already existing faith. Also, by reminding us that character is the only lasting product and the only valuable result of time, they make it clear that philosophy is not justified in inter-

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posing a veto upon faith. But after all, they are implements for clearing the ground rather than capable in themselves of building the rock-based house in which faith lives.

Others, whom metaphysical considerations leave cold, turn with wistful hopes to the Psychical Research Society. And perhaps it is sometimes forgotten by these persons that not all *kinds* of immortality are really to be desired. Those who collect evidence of survival given by spirits through mediums are insufficiently conscious, one feels, that the immortality they report is more than half repulsive, and, if proved, would, like Lord Campbell's persistent *Lives of the Chancellors*, add a new terror to death. Who can think without pain of the noble spirit of the late F. W. H. Myers as engaged for years in the fruitless effort to open communication with old friends on earth? Unless faith in immortality be frust with its roots deep in conscience, and be gathered about the great love of God our Saviour, it brings neither hope to the dying nor consolation to the living. There is no arguing with that word of Jesus: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rise from the dead."

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THE RECOVERY OF THIS FAITH.

Experience proves, I think, that the man who has lost faith in the life eternal is inaccessible, usually, to frontal attack. You can only help him back to belief in immortality by helping him back to what is yet more fundamental—belief in God. For since nothing in the creed is isolated, no one article of it can be recovered by itself. Thus it is only in view of God that future life becomes credible. It is only the man who can say: “Nevertheless, I am continually with Thee,” who will dare to add: “Thou wilt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.”

But of course it is not we who give faith back to men; it is God. And he has various ways of doing it. Often He does it through the death of a dear friend. Probably we should be surprised to learn how numerous are the cases in which the longing for re-union with the lost is the gateway at which God’s promise enters in. The man follows the lost one into the dark “with love and longing infinite,” asking his own heart over and over, Shall I see my friend again, and when, and where? It grows upon him by degrees that re-union is only possible if the dead

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are safe now—kept by some beneficent unchanging Power who at last can also make *him* safe, and link again the unclasped hands. He broods upon the thought of this transcendent Power and Love, and some day it startles him to think that the only people in the world who profess to know such Power and such Love, and to be in real connexion therewith, are Christian believers, who, if their own witness is believable, have gained this faith through contact with Jesus. It was He who brought immortality fully out into the light, and He did it by unveiling God's face. In that clear shining, Death appears as an episode. So, by lanes and by-paths each man travels for himself, the tried spirit comes to know the Father, and to feel also that bond between Father and child to which the grave can make no difference.

When we endeavour, therefore, to help men in these sore straits, it is useless or nearly so, to begin with the resurrection of Jesus as a historic fact, and drive immortality as a consequence of that. If faith in God is lacking, much more will be the power to accept the resurrection of God's Son. Let us not invert the order set by truth and nature.

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In my judgment, it is rarely men are led back to faith in life everlasting save by the instrumentality of human friendship. Recollect that trust in a friend is the first contact we make with what is absolutely real and absolutely precious. Nor can we encounter such a friend without going on to hold that we too are something to him, something dear, something clung fast to amid change and chance. But if we have gone so far, it is natural to go yet farther. It is natural to say : " I am much to this my friend ; I have a sure place in his heart. Were I to die and leave him, he would not forget me. So God, at any rate the God Whom Jesus knew, will not forget me either." Thus, through the dear medium of mortal ties, there swims into our ken the confidence that death is not the end, and once more we reach up to the old thought of Divine love mightier than Death.

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